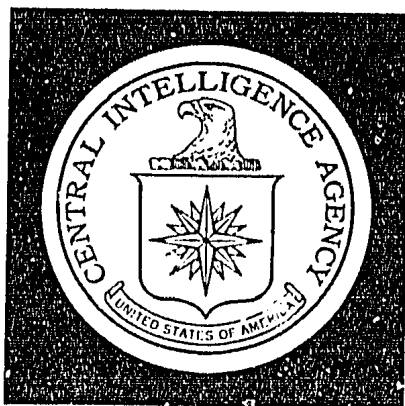


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## SPECIAL MEMORANDUM

*The Dreary Prospects for India's Communist Parties*

**Secret**

18 November 1968  
No. 22-68

C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

18 November 1968

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 22-68

SUBJECT: The Dreary Prospects for India's Communist Parties\*

SUMMARY

The Indian Communists, now split into two parties, have little prospect for acquiring much influence on the national scene despite their earlier hopes that they would do so.

The Communists have acquired control of the state of Kerala for the second time. They have failed to improve conditions there, however, and this has brought about widespread dissatisfaction.

In 1967, a left communist dominated government in West Bengal fomented serious labor unrest and for a time tolerated a small peasant revolt. That government has since fallen; New Delhi will probably not allow the Communists to return to power even if elected. The more activist Communists will probably turn to revolutionary methods. Indian police and security services would be likely to contain such efforts, however.

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1. In the mid and late 1950's, the future of the Communist Party of India (CPI) appeared fairly promising. Alone of all the opposition parties in India it seemed to offer a viable alternative to the ruling Congress Party. In the 1957 election, it doubled its nationwide vote and actually came to power in the state of Kerala. Many felt that if India in the post-Nehru era ran into serious economic or political difficulties, the CPI would become a major force and could even come to power.

2. Few are likely to feel this today. India has gone through some agonizing crises and the ruling Congress Party has often stumbled badly. But the CPI has suffered even more. Party factionalism has played a major role in bringing on its decline; even in the 1950's, there was considerable infighting among the party leaders. Though many issues were disputed, the principal one was the party's relations with the USSR. About half of their principal leaders criticized the party's slavish adherence to Soviet doctrine, which defined the Nehru regime as progressive and enjoined the support of many of its foreign and domestic policies. With some justice, the dissidents claimed that the Congress Party, aside from a few mavericks

like V. K. Krishna Menon, was a highly conservative, bourgeois organization.

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3. This intra-party wrangle coincided with the growing dispute between the USSR and China. Some of the dissidents sided openly with the Chinese, but a larger number probably had no desire to be dominated by either Peking or Moscow. Their enemies succeeded in tarring them with the Chinese brush, however. When China attacked India in late 1962, virtually all anti-Soviet Communist leaders were summarily imprisoned. Many believed their arrests were made possible by the assistance of pro-Soviet Communist leaders. A formal party split became inevitable; in 1964, the dissidents seceded and formed the left Communist Party (CPI/L); the loyalists became known as the right Communists (CPI/R).

4. Both Communist parties participated in the 1967 elections, sometimes opposing one another, sometimes in electoral alliances. Neither made any striking national gains; indeed, the two together got about the same percentage of the national vote (10 percent) as the united CPI got in 1962.

The Communists scored successes in two states, however. They again won control of Kerala and have since ruled that state in a CPI/L dominated coalition of other non-Congress parties. Their experience has not been a happy one. CPI/R and CPI/L leaders remain suspicious of and sometimes openly hostile towards one another. Economic conditions in the state continue to deteriorate, as they have for years. The state government has been unable to offer any remedies. This is hardly its fault because Kerala has an enormous surplus population, a near-total absence of industry, turbulent social conditions, and is generally unable to pressure the central government into providing any significant measure of relief. But the Communist government and particularly the CPI/L leaders are now getting blamed for Kerala's accumulating woes, and a malaise has set in in both Communist parties. Corruption, indiscipline, and disillusionment are apparently becoming more widespread among leaders and rank and file alike.

5. The left and right Communist also won enough votes in the state of West Bengal to enable them -- in conjunction with numerous other anti-Congress parties -- to form a coalition government there. Unlike their Kerala brethern,

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the Bengali Communists managed to make themselves objects of alarm to the Indian government. The new West Bengal regime, dominated by the left Communists, brought on several months of turmoil and disruption before it fell in late 1967. In India's most industrialized state, it tolerated and even encouraged something verging on chaos in labor - management relations. Permitting extremist labor leaders to pursue such tactics as locking factory owners in their offices until union demands were met, encouraging strikes for political reasons, the Communist dominated regime brought on a marked slow down economic activity, a flight of capital, and a virtual end to new investment in West Bengal.

6. Of even more serious concern to New Delhi, some Bengali Communist leaders tacitly tolerated a rural uprising which superficially had some of the aspects of a Maoist type peasant revolt. A group of primitive tribesmen armed with bows, arrows and spears, seized some tea estates on which they were working in the Naxalbari region in the northern part of the state. Some landlords and their agents were killed, others were driven out, and the properties were parceled out to the landless. The West Bengal government,

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which had the police responsibility to suppress such activity, was notably dilatory in doing so. After heavy pressure from New Delhi, action was eventually and reluctantly taken against the Naxalbari rebels and the uprising was ended. Even so, these disruptive activities deeply alarmed the federal government; eventually, through some political maneuvering, it helped bring about the dismissal of the Bengali government. New elections are scheduled to be held in early 1969.

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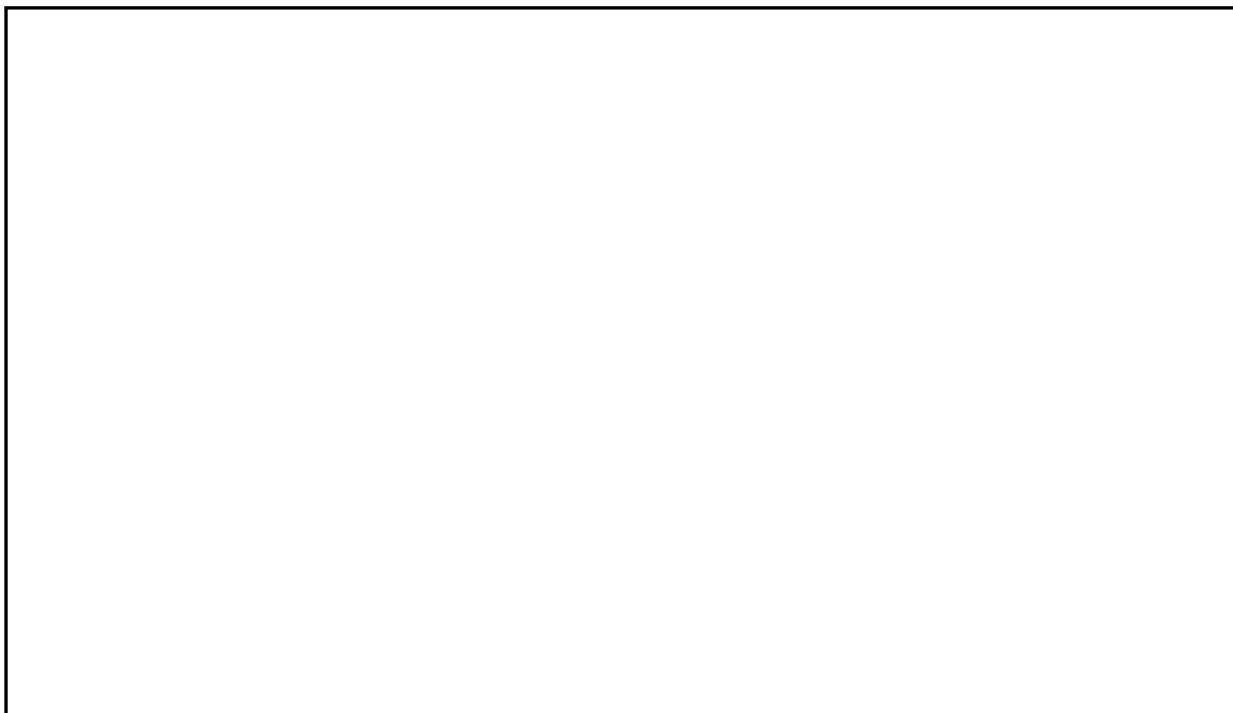
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10. Even if a Communist-dominated Bengali government is chosen in forthcoming elections, and if it comes under suspicion of aiding the Naxalites or fosters labor unrest, it will probably again be dismissed by the central government. This action will be taken whatever the political implications of a move denying the right of a freely elected government to rule. Given a choice between democratic niceties on the one hand and security and economic needs on the other, New Delhi will probably opt for what it considers its vital interests.

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11. This course will also be taken in other parts of the country in the unlikely event it appears necessary. In these circumstances, the malaise and frustrations of Indian Communism are likely to be compounded. Those in power, as in Kerala, will become more disillusioned as their public image declines. Those in opposition will be equally frustrated by their lack of popular support and -- in the case of the Bengalis -- by continued official repression. In these circumstances, we believe a substantial number of left Communists, and those of a like mind but unaffiliated with either party, will abandon their interest in participating in India's democratic, parliamentary procedures.

12. In particular, they are likely to regard open, legal Communist Party activity as a waste of time. Over the next several years they are likely to see Naxalbari and previous Indian peasants revolts\* as the models for their future efforts.

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\* The principal rural uprising to date in India was the 1948 Telengana revolt, which occurred in large areas of the present state of Andhra Pradesh. This extensive, Communist-led effort was crushed, with heavy casualties, by the Indian army.

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It is too early to tell if these would-be revolutionaries will have the dedication, perserverance, and ability to prepare for such activity, if they can find a sympathetic response in any part of the country, and if the authorities will continue to be able to counter them. Despite India's many difficulties, no Communist inspired insurrectionary attempt appears to have much prospect of success in the next few years. The police and the army remain strong and dedicated, the bulk of the people apathetic. If over time, economic and social conditions remain tolerable, and if the central government remains hostile and strong, the left Communists' prospects are bleak indeed. On the other hand, steadily worsening living standards and weakened official authority could give the Naxalites or likeminded dissidents hope of eventual successes.

13. The right wing Communists face a less turbulent, but scarcely less promising future. Its principal source of support, one of India's trade union federation, has been seriously weakened by large scale defections to new groups appealing to regional or linguistic loyalites. It has not been able to recruit new members to make up for the departure of the left Communists, and it is much weaker than the latter in both West

Bengal and Kerala. And, despite some expressions of concern in the party over recent events in Eastern Europe, its aging leaders are generally regarded as Soviet stooges. While not likely to fade away, the CPI/R will probably continue as a party on the fringe of political life, with little hope of achieving more than occasional and minor participation in coalition governments in various states, and -- much less likely -- at the center.

14. On the national scene, the best the Indian Communists have been able to achieve has been about 10 percent of the vote; thus the erosion of their strength is unlikely to make much of a nationwide impact, or to signify any new trends in Indian political life. In particular, we do not believe that sagging Communist prospects are part of any national general trend away from extremist or radical movements. There are plenty of the latter in India. But these movements, unlike

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the Communists, generally appeal to communal, sectarian, linguistic, or regional sentiments. They now appear to be growing stronger, and could present a greater threat to Indian democracy than the Communists.

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FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



Chairman

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